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Ministry of Forests

FOREST PILOT MEANS FIRST NATION JOBS

– A conditional community forest pilot agreement with the Cheslatta Carrier Nation announced today by Forests Minister Michael de Jong will result in new jobs and economic opportunities in northwestern British Columbia.

De Jong said the agreement addresses the economic and cultural interests of the First Nation, as well as provincial forest management goals. "Our government is committed to creating new opportunities for First Nations. This land has special meaning to the Cheslatta people, so they want to be involved in managing its forests. And it is on the edge of the mountain pine beetle epidemic, so it needs immediate attention to protect adjoining forest lands."

"The awarding of this community forest is most symbolic today as it signals the end of a gruelling 50-year-long journey," said Chief Richard Peters. "The Cheslatta people have come full circle since they were chased out of their villages on Cheslatta Lake in 1952. Today we can go back home and resume our stewardship of the land we love."

De Jong said the government will expand First Nations involvement in the revitalization of B.C.'s forest sector through opportunities like the community forest pilot. "We recently changed the provincial Forest Act so we have more flexibility to award forest tenures to First Nations in specific situations. This will help increase economic opportunities for First Nations, as well as encouraging more partnerships like Cheslatta Forest Products."

The community forest pilot agreement, which covers about 25,000 hectares around Cheslatta Lake, will yield added benefits because the wood will be processed by Cheslatta Forest Products Ltd., which opened earlier this year. The $9.5-million sawmill and planer mill at Ootsa Lake processes timber killed by the mountain pine beetle and fibre salvaged from Nechako Reservoir. It is owned equally by the Cheslatta Carrier Nation (Nootsenay Enterprises Ltd.), local residents (Ootsa Resources Ltd.) and Carrier Forest Products Ltd.

The community forest pilot agreement is expected to be finalized by the end of the summer so harvesting can begin in late fall or early winter. Negotiations between the ministry and Cheslatta Carrier Nation will determine specific area boundaries, harvest rates and forest management activities for a five-year community forest pilot, as well as inviting public and stakeholder input. At the end of the five-year pilot term, communities are eligible for long-term agreements of 25 to 99 years.

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